

The Slavophile lexicon of *personality*

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Abstract The lexeme *personality* and its derivatives have played an important role in the development of Slavophile teachings. Slavophilism is a comprehensive utopian project and includes philosophical, theological, social and political ideas and concepts. It intends to provide a justification for certain religious and social ideals as well as for a vision of the historical direction in which Russia should continue to develop. The article discusses the essence of this justification, its background and development through the analysis of the lexeme as used by the Slavophiles.

Keywords Slavophile personality · Culture · Wholeness · Orthodoxy

The lexeme *personality* and its derivatives (*personality's source, person, guise*, etc.) have played an important role in the development of Slavophile teachings. Slavophilism is a comprehensive utopian project and includes philosophical, theological, social and political ideas and concepts. It intends to provide a justification for certain religious and social ideals as well as for a vision of the historical direction in which Russia should continue to develop. Despite its fundamental syncretism, Slavophilism holds a conviction in the importance of philosophy, provided that it is able to acquire new principles.

The notion of *personality*, according to the Slavophiles, signifies any person who is separated from nature; and not only an individual but also a *human collectivity such as a people, a state*, etc. can have *personality* as well.

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“There is a rational, conscious source of the personality in man that separates him from nature” (Aksakov K. 1985a, p. 435). And: “Arguing about human personality, have not they [liberals—A.A.] constantly encroached on the people’s personality?” (Aksakov I. 2002a, p. 299).

The widespread use of the lexeme *personality* was conditioned in particular by a need to differentiate two types of culture, Western and Russian, and correspondingly to define two different types of *personality*. The Western type is characterized by the following epithets: *a law-to-itself, autonomous, selfish, divided, separated, detached, isolated, disjoint, or solitary*. The notions *private* or *individual identity* (*selfhood*) are close to these epithets. The Orthodox type that keeps the Christian faith in its purity and sustains the community as a form of the social existence is characterized by the lexemes: *moral Christian personality* existing in *wholeness*.

The uniqueness of the *Orthodox personality*, as it is understood by the Slavophiles, is characterized by the strong convergence of interpersonal relations, which corresponds to the ideal of the Christian Church. The Slavophiles see the authentic form of human existence in *community* and especially in the *village commune* (*mir*). This is particularly true for the brothers Aksakov and Jurij F. Samarin who consider the earthly community (*mir*) as the realization, though inevitably an imperfect one, of Christianity.¹

There is a people who had experienced the communal way of life even before Christianity. This is the Russian people whose communal life has been sanctified through the adoption of Christianity. The Russians have mastered the great idea of *community* in ancient times, and because of this they have accepted Christianity into their soul and existence exceptionally deeply (Aksakov K. 1985a, p. 435).

The notion of *personality* is articulated by the Slavophiles in the context of the controversy with the doctrine of *individual selfhood*, developed in the philosophy and practices of the European Enlightenment along socio-juridical and economic lines. The critique of Enlightenment (as a type of culture) is carried out by opposing its practices and modes of thought through another type of culture with a different, organic and integral, way of thinking. In other words, in the dispute with European philosophers the Slavophiles have rejected not so much European philosophers’ understanding of social life (rather, they recognized that the European philosophy mirrors established practices) but the way of life reflected in European thought. The Slavophiles are convinced that philosophical concepts are not arbitrary but reflect a specific reality. Such a position rejects the universality of theoretical thinking and its results which are acquired without regard to the types of *culture* and *personality*. This idea is clearly expressed by Ivan Kireyevsky who stresses the dependency of the quality and potential depth of thinking on the integrality of the person and the inner wholeness of her being.

Being at the highest level of thinking, an Orthodox believer can easily and without damaging his own thoughts understand all the different systems of

¹ Aksakov K. (1985b, pp. 364–365).

reason unfolding on the lower levels of thinking. He can see their limitations and yet also their relative truths. But to those, whose thinking remains on the lower levels, the highest one is unclear and seems folly. This is the general law of the human mind (Kireyevsky 1979a, p. 320).

It is important to notice the distinctive association made by the Slavophiles between the lexemes *personality*, *self*, and the word *source*. It is very clearly noticeable when they are discussing the need for *personality* to overcome itself or the role of *personality* in the history and life of a *community*. Thus, the overcoming of *selfhood* realizes, according to the Slavophiles, the authentic and proper existence of *personality*. This movement presupposes the existence of conscious activity: that of going through a peculiar split of *personality*. It manifests itself in being a center of active volition and at the same time its object. This split of *personality* is no accident for the Slavophiles as we notice the absence of consistent lexical expression for *overcoming of selfhood* in the sense of *self-determination*. Thus, the center of *personality* exists outside the individual and is found in a higher source. A righteous person is being led in his activities, but a person who acts voluntarily and autonomously is doomed to a vicious and false form of existence. We may notice that frequent references to the possibility of a genuine communion include without exception a reminder about the necessity to *overcome selfhood (personality)* as the main act that constitutes a community.

Where the community (as the Slavophiles understand it) is a reality, its members (*personalities*) naturally do not face the task of *overcoming selfhood*. Only in modern society where the formation of *self-acting autonomous personality* becomes a reality, has the task of *overcoming selfhood* become urgent and is one of the necessary aims of the Slavophiles' project.

The source of any *personality* is God's personality. *Personality is given* (to individuals and to human collectivities) and does not somehow come to being naturally.

"Personality is given to man so that he would knowingly and freely overcome it in himself. He must find it not in himself, but in God" (Aksakov K. 1985a, p. 435). Existence as *One* distinguishes God's personality exclusively. "*One* is only God, and only He is love for He is God and He is ubiquitous. He is the only true *personality* for only He is boundless, *One* and *All*. Whoever is not God is Satan" (Aksakov K. 1985a, p. 438).

All explanations concerning the meaning of *personality* are based on the notion that its reality and essence, as in a sensible and moral being, are determined by the degree of involvement in the reality of God, the source of all being. This means that *personality* does not have any autonomous substance. Only because of the sinfulness of the human being and the complete oblivion of its *source* could *personality* be thought of as a self-sustaining substance. In this light, the direction and character of personal existence determine all the essential dimensions of an individual and his social life, both in its truth and delusions. According to the main idea of the Slavophiles, the source of authentic existence is not confined to natural human reasoning or in the projects that are devised and controlled by people as

autonomous agents. On the contrary, this source is a higher authority, and therefore the acts accomplished by a *person* are not fully determined by the *person* itself and should be understood, to a great extent, as instinctive and rooted in customs and traditions. Men are compelled to appeal to a supreme truth, and *personality* could be enlightened by this truth only through rejecting *selfhood* as its own, wholly independent, source of truth. Faith is the deciding condition for the realization of the authentic way of life and proper human activities.

Consciousness about the closeness of the living divine Person to *human personality* serves as basis for faith, or, more correctly, faith is exactly this consciousness, more or less clear, more or less direct. It does not consist of purely human knowledge, it is not a certain concept in the mind or in the heart, it does not fit any special cognitive ability, and it does not relate to any specific logical facility, or to any specific emotion, or to any specific ethical commandment, but it embraces the entire wholeness of man and appears only in the moment of realization of this wholeness and in proportion to its fullness (Kireyevsky 1979b, pp. 333–334).

*The inner dispensation of human spirit by the force of the truth that is revealed in this spirit*² determines the positive substance of *personality* derived from one God exclusively. Semën Frank was right to observe about the Russian metaphysical consciousness that “[n]ot a tendency toward God, but existence in God constitutes the essence of this religious ontologism” (Frank 1996, p. 173). This thought entirely corresponds to the perceptions of the Slavophiles that existence in God is existence in the truth. It ensures direct access to the truth and does not require *metamorphic development*.

The image of Rationalism, as pictured by the Slavophiles, aims to emphasize the meaning of their confrontation with European philosophy with which they were obsessed and which lies at the basis of their utopian project. The soulless logical machine of reason is the part of culture which wholeness of life consistently extirpates and formal this-world focused principles entrench. The search for an alternative concept aims at laying bare the source of organic thinking that would correspond to life itself and would not succumb to objectification, formalization, and mechanization but would be substantial, not abstract, and *personal* in its substance. Indeed, the *personality's source* (rather than the abstract cogitative “I” of Rationalism) is the *birthplace of thought* in human beings; and authentic human thinking is rooted, first of all, in the wholeness of life subject to the true faith.

For no matter how little developed the rational thinking of a believer, in the depth of his Orthodox soul he is aware that Divine truth is not confined to the ordinary considerations of reason but requires a *higher spiritual vision* that is based not on outward erudition but on *the inner integrity of being* [emphasis—A. A.] (Kireyevsky 1979a, p. 320).

Truth itself is supra-personal, and our ability to understand and to express it depends, in the final analysis, on our communion with the very source of our entire

² Kireyevsky (1979c, p. 190).

personal existence. This can be guaranteed by authentic faith alone. The wholeness of *personality* and the force of inner consciousness as the foci of all the particular powers of reason are the necessary conditions for obtaining the truth.³

The type and structure of *personal being* and their realization are correlated to certain public forms of human life. The forms of social intercourse between people in a given society and the types of *personality* are dependant on each other. This does not negate the superiority of the community (*communal principle*) since *personality* exists only in the community. “Therefore, it [the community—A.A.] itself constitutes the highest and all-inclusive principle” (Aksakov K. 1985a, p. 437).

The semantic characteristics of *personality* are defined exclusively in the context of the rigid contrast between two types of culture, and this leads to the fact that the identical use of the word may have directly opposite meanings. Therefore the usage of words *personality* or society (as *community*) must be qualified accordingly to the context of their usage, and in a number of contexts we hear about the inadequateness and conditional character of these lexemes and the need for their replacement.

Thus, [in European culture there] “... appears the union of people, similar to society; *but this is not society* [emphasis—A.A.], this is a social contract, a public arrangement, where the personality of the autonomous individual remains in the center. This type of *personality* is constrained by aspirations for personal welfare and is compelled to interact with others in order to acquire benefits and at the same time to limit itself conditionally in order to avoid quarrels” (Aksakov K. 1985a, p. 439).

A key to the understanding of the concept of *integral personality* lies in the Slavophiles’ understanding of historical forces. A. S. Khomjakov explains:

The orderly and successful development of a coherent society consists of two different, but orderly and harmonious forces. One of them is central, basic and it acts through social history as a whole, past and present. It is the force of life, deployed from its own source, unfolding by its own strength. Another is the force of [rational] *personality* that depends on social impulses and gets its strength from the energy of these impulses. *This force has not created anything in history and does not strive to create anything* [emphasis—A.A.]. However, this force constantly helps society to continue its general development and prevents it from being reduced to a blind and heartless instinctive or reckless unilateralism. Both forces are necessary; but the second, speculative in its rationality, must be connected by living and loving faith with the first force of life and creation (Khomjakov 1988, p. 186).

In a similar description of two types of knowledge I. V. Kireyevsky points to the first type as the salient historical force. It is *the inner spirit whose constitution is created by the force of truth revealed in the spirit*. It is the source of fundamental convictions that determine the order of inner being of men and peoples as well as the direction of their external existence. However, especially important here is the fact that this force “does not undergo any change or development. It requires only

³ See Kireyevsky (1979a, pp. 318–319).

direct acknowledgement, retention and amplification in the subordinate spheres of human spirit” (Kireyevsky 1979c, p. 189).

The second type of knowledge depends on the first but it gives *content* and *completeness* to it. It is the result of “eons of slow and hard work, of endless efforts, experiments, failures, successes, observations, and inventions; it is a product of the entire successive growth of the mental faculties of mankind” (Kireyevsky 1979c, p. 189) that have been gradually developed through the joint personal efforts of all people and the summation of their insights.

The characteristic of the second force (or type of knowledge), according to both Khomjakov and in Kireyevsky, necessarily assumes the utilization of concepts *personality*, *personality’s source*, *personal effort*, *personal understanding*. They reflect, to be exact, the personal dimensions of the historical process. The character of the first force does not need these lexemes. It is free from any trace of *personality* and, at the same time, of any trace of *alienation*.

The impersonal force of genuine historical development operates freely without encountering any resistance only when *personality* has abandoned its egoism and finds itself no longer as *individual selfhood* but as *the community of mutually loving personalities*. In the community *individual selfhood* is not in the center of its own being but *one of the rays that emanate in harmony from their source—the union of love whose invisible center resides in God*. (Aksakov K. 1985a, p. 437). On the contrary, when *selfhood* takes precedence then

society, created in history, is alienated from the history as *caput mortuum*. There is no history in life anymore, there is no organic life, and there is no society with the living source. There is only the conglomerate of *personalities* who are searching without success for the wholeness of their collective life (Khomjakov 1988, p. 194).

The Slavophiles resort to the darkest tones to portray the characteristics of North American society. Here the cruel principles of egoism are not checked as they are in Europe where the roots of the ancestral life still exist in the legends and in the *memory of pristine days*. The unprecedented gathering of people in America, *a most varied and most diverse rabble*, have made mutual agreement the basis of their society, which proclaims the unlimited freedom of *personality* but has lost the higher moral purpose. Here the freedom of *personality* degenerates into personal arbitrariness and the triumph of selfishness.⁴

This sharp moral judgment follows from the unqualified rejection by the Slavophiles of any autonomous independent *individual personality* and from their condemnation of that type of social association that became predominant in the West from the beginning of the modern period of European history. In spite of this rejection the Slavophiles do justly acknowledge the powerful development of *individual personality* in the West; though in their eyes this development loses its value as a result of the moral degradation of *personality*.

⁴ See Aksakov I. (2002b, p. 433).

Western Europe has arisen from the assertion of *selfhood as personality's source*, and consequently there is no society in the real sense but just a social contract. On the other hand, this assertion of *selfhood* in every individual wakes active personal forces and abilities; and egoism outwardly reveals itself in remarkable activity, pride and beauty (Aksakov K. 1985a, pp. 440–441).

The way of European life, both private and public, according to Kireyevsky, is based on the acknowledgement of the highest importance of *autonomous personality*. He concludes: “Hence the sanctity of property and conditional prescripts are more important than *personality*” (Kireyevsky 1979d, p. 147). This conclusion presupposes the possibility to compare *property and legal order* with *personality* and to define their relative values and importance. To a large extent it is guided by the ideology of customary law and traditional justice, which in turn assume a different type of *personality*. As long as in Russia the land and property belong to the whole society (*Tsar's land*), “a person has the right of possession to the degree he is integrated in that society” (Kireyevsky 1979d, p. 148).

Kireyevsky asserts that in Russia, in contrast to Europe, *personality* is the first principle of the Russian community, and the property right is just a derivative consequence. This formula should be understood in the light of the Slavophile interpretation of *property* and the types of *personality*. “Since, in spite all the successes and achievements of European culture, its connection with the vital and moral force of life has been weakened, the wholeness and content of this culture are being destroyed, and this is reflected in the degradation of the European type of personality” (See Aksakov K. 1985a, p. 441).

A special place in the Slavophile views on society and public life is assigned to *the people* summoned to insert true-life concreteness into social, philosophical and historical notions of *personality*, *history*, and *society*. The Slavophile understanding of *the people's* role in their realization is close to European romanticism.

The people is that great power and that bond which hold people together. The *individual person* estranged from the people would be a useless egoist, and mankind would then be just an empty abstraction. The disjointing selfish element of personality must be moderated by the higher power of a living union of the people or, in other words, by the generous gift of communion between people (Aksakov K. 1985b, p. 364).

Because *the people* is the fundament of the whole social structure there must be an intimate connection and mutual understanding between *personalities* and the common people. Ivan Aksakov writes:

Those who belong to the people *do not notice* the effect on their personal thoughts but this effect cannot be doubted for there are no thoughts *meditating* relations between *individual personalities* within people and the people [as a whole] (Aksakov I. 2002c, p. 138).

Thus, personal thought which *directly* participates in the life of the people and *reflects* their needs, is primordial and belongs to both a person and to the people equally. This is so because *personality* is absorbed by the people, exists

and acts not as *autonomous selfhood* but as *an element and part of the organism of the people* (Aksakov I. 2002c, p. 139).

The Slavophiles' political opposition to liberalism (Western and domestic) is in many respects due to their radical rejection of the link (accepted by liberals) between *autonomously acting personalities* (their rights and freedoms) and the leading role of impersonal mechanisms in the organization of public life. The Slavophiles articulated a different idea.

The Western type of impersonal constitutional government controlled by supreme autocratic power of a parliamentary majority cannot bear any *personal* responsibility for unjust laws and decrees which humiliate its countries (Aksakov I. 2002d, p. 357) [emphasis mine, A.A.].

The wholeness of public life under the supremacy of a communal principle has its fullness in the single *personal* supreme power (monarchy) that

bears heavy responsibility—a heavy, *though a purely moral responsibility* [emphasis added A.A.]—responsibility before God, conscience, history, and the nation (Aksakov I. 2002d, p. 357).

In other words, a political power is capable of being responsible when it is *personified* in a monarch and follows the code of action prescribed to this *personality*. For the Slavophiles, *supreme personality* is conjugated in its being with the existence of *community* which encloses and absorbs *personalities*. In contrast, the liberals' impersonal *constitutional principle* (Aksakov I. 2002d, p. 357), the *impersonal source* of its authority is conjugated with the *egoistic personality* self-constrained only by a social contract.

The communal way of life is not and cannot be grounded in *personality* but presupposes the highest act of personal freedom and consciousness, the act self-abnegation (Samarin 1996, p. 432).

Samarin in the dispute with Kavelin reproaches the latter for his view on the *German type of personality* and the German type of social development as an absolute positive meaning. Through applications of this idea to Russian history Kavelin evaluates it

... negatively. He is utterly amazed by the absence in Russian history of the understanding of *personality* as an unconditional value, i.e., the absence of the *German personality*. Out of this fact he derived the absence of *personality* in Russian history *in general*, that is to say, the lack of consciousness free from the domination of tribal instincts (Samarin 1996, p. 426).

All of this was unacceptable to the Slavophiles.

The Slavophiles inevitably encountered difficulties in their assertion of the *organic type of personality* when they applied their teachings in the contexts of jurisprudence, history and philosophy. They sought for the resolution of these difficulties in a religious context, and, precisely, in Christianity, where the personality receives not only special treatment but also becomes a certain focus of

the Christian teaching. Although the Slavophiles frequently distinguish two separate planes of existence, one eternal and the other transient, nevertheless in the treatment of two types of *personality* they were forced to bring these together. This entailed either the complete negation of any link between *autonomous personality* and its Christian source or the equally doubtful attempt to envisage the members of community as the earthly embodiment of *Christian personality*. *Community* itself was treated not as an historical reality but as the ideal hallowed by Christianity and unattainable in this world.⁵

In any case the lexeme *Christian personality* becomes more frequent in the works of the younger Slavophiles, Ivan Aksakov and Jurij Samarin. The critical and accusatory enthusiasm of their journalism was sustained by turning directly to the duties and responsibilities of *Christian personality*. Here we find a reflection on serious changes in Russian public life, in particular the weakening of the communal way of life (*mir*).

The traditional way of life of our people has suffered internal shocks, and its vital force that has lived in Russians has become somewhat feeble and misdirected. It is necessary, now more than ever, to protect and strengthen the Christian roots of *personality* in the people. We are convinced that when the *Christian awareness* penetrates communal elements, *personal* morality is strengthened in the people without diminishing the principle of communal life and the wholeness of the people's organism (Aksakov I. 2002e, p. 238).

The Slavophiles constantly contrast internal existence with *external*. They condemn the latter in its aspiration for independence and subjugation of all human actions. Here we clearly see the proximity of Slavophilism and the German romanticism of the late 18th and early 19th centuries. Also we see similarities between Friedrich Schlegel's *Philosophie des Lebens* (*The Philosophy of Life*), 1828, and Ivan Kireyevsky's ideas (cf. Schlegel 1983, p. 344 and Kireyevsky 1979b, p. 334). Many aspects of the Slavophile vision could be found in Ferdinand Tönnies' (the founder of the German sociology) *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft*, 1887.

Also there is a certain affinity between the Slavophilism and the critique of the civil society expressed by young Karl Marx in the *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher*, especially in the article *On the Jewish Question* (*Zur Judenfrage*, 1844).

None of the supposed rights of man, therefore, go beyond egoistic man, man as he is, as a member of civil society; that is, an individual separated from the community, withdrawn into himself, wholly preoccupied with his private interest and acting in accordance with his private caprice. Man is far from being considered, in the rights of man, as a species-being; on the contrary, species-life itself—society—appears as a system which is external to the individual and as a limitation of his original independence. The only bond

⁵ Aksakov K. (1985b, pp. 364–365).

between men is natural necessity, need and private interest, the preservation of their property and their egoistic persons (Marx 1972, p. 41).

It is of interest as well that, according to Marx, Christianity (naturally Western Christianity) has played an important role in the development of civil society. At the same time Marx emphasized that this development leads to the *externalization* of social relations.⁶ The same was stressed by the Slavophiles.

It should be noticed that in the context of cultural connections and interactions between Russia and Germany the Slavophile views were in sharp contrast to the philosophy of Kant. It would be instructive to compare Kant's *Idee zu einer allgemeinen Geschichte in weltbürgerlicher Absicht* (*The Idea of a World History from a Cosmopolitan Perspective*) with the thought of Konstantin Aksakov about the present-day man. One point is worth mentioning that indicates an essential difference between their views. For Aksakov (and other Slavophiles) the need for *harmony* and *oneness* of thinking is a constituent principle of community; however, for Kant such a unity of thinking points to the deep *stagnation* of social life. (Cf. Aksakov K. 1985a, p. 436 and Kant 1993, p. 93).

The conceptual heritage of Slavophilism, including their views on *personality*, subsequently became an important part of philosophical and ideological debates in Russian intellectual and political life.

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⁶ See Marx (1972, pp. 50–51).

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